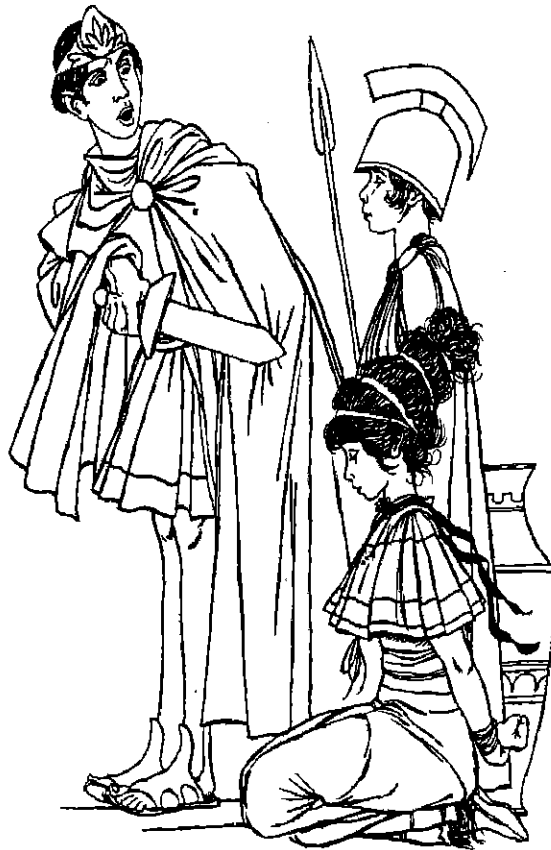


Sophocles'
Antigone



A Greek Tragedy

**A children's translation
adapted by
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Introduction

Staging *Antigone* is very simple. There are three vital factors within the play: Creon, the royal power, the individuals who oppose him, and the Greek chorus. These three factions can be designated, identified, and located by using three platforms. The royal power has the highest platform and is in the center, the people who speak to him in opposition are on a lower platform to the right, and the Greek chorus is on a still lower platform to the left of center. The platforms will eliminate the confusion of staging and make the cast feel secure. Of course it is not necessary for the actors to stay on their respective platforms all the time. A striking contrast in the height of the platforms will make your stage setting most effective. It will be even better to have a set of steps leading up to the highest platform... just two or three steps are enough. Wooden blocks from the kindergarten can be used for this purpose.

As for costumes, use large pieces of solid colored cloth with a hole cut out for the head. Anyone designating royalty can have a tinge of yellow or gold around the edges of his robe. The soldiers can wear shorter tunics that come to the knees. The wider the material, the more folds the costumes will have.

Vocabulary

abhorrence	bribed	defiant
accusations	brief	desperate
advice	burial	destruction
advise	calamity	direst
amends	cease	disaster
appointed	chariot	disgrace
approve	claim	dishonor
arrogant	concerns	dismays
authority	confirm	disobedience
avengers	confronts	distinct
banished	content	doom
behold	convince	edict
borne	decreed	embraced

ensnare	necessity	senseless
enterprise	ordained	sentinel
entombed	outrage	serpent
evident	override	shrill
exile	penalty	shudder
fetch	perilous	slain
folly	perplexed	solemn
forbidden	possess	suffice
government	prey	summoned
grief	proclaim	swerved
guilt	proclamation	swoop
hence	profit	swoop
honor	prophesied	task
intolerable	prophet	temperate
issued	rage	tomb
judgment	reckless	train
kinship	rejected	traitor
lament	remorse	tyranny
lamentations	resist	unnatural
launch	resolved	vile
loathsome	resource	villain
lurking	rite	wearisome
misery	royal	will
moans	sacred	wisdom
mourn	scorn	yield
muttering	scorn	

Antigone

Characters

CREON, King of Thebes
EURYDICE, Creon's wife
HAEMON, Creon's son
ANTIGONE
ISMENE
TEIRESIAS, a blind prophet
Messenger
Sentinels
Chorus Leader
Chorus
A Boy

ANTIGONE: Oh sister Ismene? Unhappiness, calamity, disgrace, and dishonor have fallen upon us. Our brothers are dead, and now King Creon has issued a proclamation to all the city. Do you understand? Or do you not know what outrage threatens one of those we love?

ISMENE: Antigone, I have heard nothing . . . nothing since our two brothers were killed in battle.

ANTIGONE: I sensed as much, and that is why I have brought you outside the palace to tell you secretly.

ISMENE: There's trouble in you looks, Antigone. What is it? Some dark shadow is upon you.

ANTIGONE: It concerns our brothers' burial. King Creon has ordained honor for one and disdain for the other. Eteocles is to be entombed with every solemn rite and ceremony to do him honor, but as for Polyneices, King Creon has ordered that none shall bury him or mourn for him. Polyneices must be left to lie unwept and unburied, for

hungry birds of prey to swoop and feast on his poor body! So King Creon has decreed to all the citizens and to you and to me. He who disobeys King Creon shall be put to death. Will you join hands with me and share my task?

ISMENE: What dangerous enterprise have you in mind?

ANTIGONE: To lift his body! Will you join me?

ISMENE: Would you dare bury him against Creon's law?

ANTIGONE: My brother I will bury, and no one shall say I failed.

ISMENE: You are too bold! King Creon has forbidden it.

ANTIGONE: He has no right to keep me from burying my own brother.

ISMENE: Antigone, please remember that we are but women and not made to fight with men. I yield to those who have the authority.

ANTIGONE: I will not attempt to convince you, but I shall bury him. If I have to die for this pure crime, I am content, for I shall rest beside him. But you, if you so choose, may scorn the sacred laws of burial that heaven holds in honor.

ISMENE: Nay, I do not scorn, but against King Creon's will I am too weak.

ANTIGONE: Make that your excuse. I go to heap earth upon the brother I love.

ISMENE: I fear for you. I tremble for your life.

ANTIGONE: Look to yourself, but do not fear for me!

ISMENE: Your heart is full with fever.

ANTIGONE: I will face the danger that so dismays you for it cannot be so dreadful as to die a coward's death.

ISMENE: Then go if you must. Your task is senseless and blind folly, but remem-

ber that I love you dearly, sister Antigone.

(Exit Antigone and Ismene in opposite directions.)

(Enter the chorus.)

CHORUS: Here comes Creon, the new King of Thebes.

Why has he called this gathering?

CREON: By royal edict I have summoned you here. Upon a single day two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, killed each other. I now possess the throne and royal power by right of nearest kinship with the dead. Of the two brothers who died in battle I proclaim the following edict. Eteocles, none more valiant than he who fought gloriously for his country and so laid down his life, shall be entombed with every grace and honor. But Polyneices, who returned from exile to fight against us, shall be left unburied until the birds of the air and the dogs have picked his bones. Such is my will!

CHORUS: Such is your will, my lord.

CREON: Look to it then and see that you defend the law now made. I have appointed guards to watch the unburied body.

CHORUS: What further orders do you lay on us?

CREON: That you resist whoever disobeys!

CHORUS: None are so foolish as to long for death.

CREON: Death is indeed the price!

(Enter sentinel.)

SENTINEL: Creon, my King, I am out of breath with running. I am here to tell you all. It may be nothing, still I'll tell you. I can suffer nothing more than what is my fate.

CREON: Is your news unpleasant?

SENTINEL: Aye, and fear makes a man pause long.

CREON: Make an end to it. Tell your story and be gone.

SENTINEL: Then here it is. The body, the unburied body of Polyneices, has been sprinkled with dust and given the sacred rites!

CREON: What man has dared a deed so rash?

SENTINEL: I know not. There was no sign of digging, the earth was hard and dry and undisturbed. There was no track of chariot wheels. He who had done such a deed left no trace at all.

CHORUS: Perhaps this deed was ordered by the gods?

CREON: Silence! Cease your chatter or my wrath will fall upon you. I know that a man could be bribed to do this act. Of all vile things on earth, none is so vile as money. I speak to you plainly and confirm it with this oath - unless you find the author of this burial rite, mere death shall not suffice. You shall be hanged alive until you spit forth the doer of the crime.

SENTINEL: I am not the one who did it!

CREON: Then bring forth the man who did!

SENTINEL: May the gods grant that he be found!

(Exit Creon to the palace and the Sentinel to the burial grounds.)

CHORUS: 'Many are the wonders' of the world, and none so wonderful as man. Full of resource against all that comes to him is man. Against death alone is he left with no defence.

(Enter Sentinel with Antigone.)

CHORUS LEADER: What strange sight is this? I doubt my eyes!

CHORUS: Antigone! Antigone! What have you done? Unlucky daughter of an unlucky father. It cannot be you who has

disobeyed King Creon?

SENTINEL: We caught her in the act of burying her brother! Where is King Creon?

(Enter Creon.)

CHORUS: Back from the palace in good time he comes.

CREON: Why do you bring this girl? Where was she taken?

SENTINEL: Burying her brother we captured her! All was evident.

CREON: Is this the truth?

SENTINEL: I saw her burying the body you had forbidden to be touched. Is that distinct and clear?

CREON: Speak you who look down at the earth. Are these accusations true or false?

ANTIGONE: I admit to all. I do not deny it!

CREON: Sentinel, you may go. *(Exit Sentinel.)* But tell me, and let your speech be brief, had you not heard of my edict forbidding such a deed?

ANTIGONE: I heard and knew.

CREON: And you dared to disobey my law?

ANTIGONE: It was not Zeus who issued this decree, nor did I believe that you Creon, a man, could override the laws of heaven!

CHORUS: Antigone shows her father's temperament, fierce and defiant. She will not yield to any storm!

CREON: Those who are most obstinate suffer the greatest fall. I have seen the wildest horses tamed and only be a tiny bit. This girl is insolent, and she boasts of what she did. Even though she be my niece, she shall not escape the direst penalty, and neither shall her sister escape such penalty.

(A sentinel exits to fetch Ismene.)

ANTIGONE: Would you do more than simply take and kill me?

CREON: I desire no more.

ANTIGONE: Why do you delay? I have no pleasure in hearing you speak. What greater glory could I have presented to heaven than to bury a brother!

CREON: You are the only one in the city to think so.

ANTIGONE: The people think as I do but hold their breath for fear of you.

CREON: You honored a traitor.

ANTIGONE: It was a brother who died, not a slave.

CREON: Down then to death! No woman while I live shall master me.

CHORUS LEADER: See, here comes Ismene.

(Enter sentinels holding Ismene.)

CREON: You, lurking like a serpent in my house, draining my blood, do you confess you shared this burial or will you swear you had no knowledge of such a deed?

ISMENE: I share the blame and do not shrink.

ANTIGONE: No! Justice forbids your claim.

You refused, and I gave you no part of it!

ISMENE: I am glad to share your danger at your side.

ANTIGONE: I love not those who love in words alone.

ISMENE: Sister, let me spill my blood with yours.

ANTIGONE: Leave me to die alone. Remember, you would not help me. You cannot claim as yours what you rejected.

ISMENE: What joy have I to live when you have gone?

ANTIGONE: Ask Creon. It was Creon whom you cared for!

ISMENE: Oh mighty Creon! Antigone is Haemon's bride. Can you kill her, the bride of your son?

CREON: Are there no women in the world but she? An evil wife I like not for my son.

ANTIGONE: Oh Haemon, hear not your

father's scorn.

CREON: You, Antigone, have become wearisome to me!

ISMENE: Oh mighty King, he is your son! How can you take her from him?

CREON: It is not I, but death that stops this wedding.

CHORUS: It seems then, oh Creon, that you are resolved that she must die?

CREON: Delay no more! Take them away!
(*Sentinels drag out Antigone and Ismene.*)

CHORUS: Thrice happy are those who have never known disaster!

CHORUS LEADER: See! Here comes Haemon, your son.

CREON: Do you come in anger, Haemon, or are you still my loyal son, whatever I may do?

HAEMON: Father, I am your son, and may your wise judgment rule me.

CREON: In all things be guided by your father. All men pray that they will have obedient children. So, think this woman Antigone your enemy and spit on her. There is no greater curse than disobedience. This brings destruction upon a city.

HAEMON: Father, it is the gods who give us wisdom, but it is my duty as your son to report to you what the people of the city are saying. The city mourns this girl, and they are saying that she does not deserve death for burying a brother. They say she deserves a crown of gold. Such is the muttering that spreads everywhere. Father, the man who thinks that he alone is wise, is often proven to be empty. There's no disgrace in learning more and knowing when to yield, even if one is king. Oh father King, let your anger cool and profit from the wisdom of another.

CHORUS: Oh King, your son has not spoken foolishly. You can learn wisdom from another.

CREON: I, King of Thebes, should take a lesson from a boy?

HAEMON: Think of what should be done and not of my age.

CREON: To honor disobedience? Is that what should be done?

HAEMON: This is not government but tyranny!

CREON: Villain! Do you oppose your father's will?

HAEMON: Only because you are opposing justice.

CREON: You shall be sorry for this talk! Bring out that loathsome creature named Antigone, that abhorrence, that she may die before Haemon's very eyes!

HAEMON: You shall from this hour not look again upon my face! (*Exits.*)

CHORUS: In anger he has gone, my lord. The young when they are greatly hurt, grow desperate.

CREON: He shall not save these women from their doom.

CHORUS: Are you prepared to destroy both sisters?

CREON: Not Ismene, for she has not sinned against me.

CHORUS LEADER: What of the other? How is she to be slain?

CREON: Into a deserted cave she will be thrust. There let her pray for death! (*Exits.*)

CHORUS: Behold! They bring Antigone here. We cannot keep back our tears, which rise like a flood.

(*Enter sentinels holding Antigone.*)

ANTIGONE: Friends and my countrymen, now do I make my last journey, now do I see the last sun that ever I shall behold. Never another! Ah, cruel doom to be banished from earth.

CHORUS: You were too bold, too reckless. Now kingly power takes terrible vengeance!

ANTIGONE: Unwept and unfriended,
cheered by no song they drag me to death!
Never again shall I see the sun in the
heavens.

(Enter Creon.)

CREON: Enough of this! Hence with her!
Into her tomb prison as I commanded.
She shall live no more among the living.

ANTIGONE: Why should I look to heaven
for help if this is what the gods approve?

CREON: Your end has arrived. The sentence
is passed. I have no comfort to give you!

(Sentinels drag out Antigone.)

CHORUS: Behold! Teiresias, blind but see-
ing all men, enters our land.

(Enter Teiresias guided by a boy.)

TEIRESIAS: My lord, King of Thebes, my
journey is shared with this lad for the
blind need someone to guide their steps.

CREON: What tidings, old Teiresias, do you
bring?

TEIRESIAS: Hear then the prophet. You will
do well to listen.

CREON: Have I ever from your wisdom
swerved?

TEIRESIAS: You now tread the razor's sedge.

CREON: Your words make me shudder.
Speak more.

TEIRESIAS: Before the sun has set you will
give a child of your own body to make
amends for murder. The gods are aroused
against you. They are avengers, and they
lie in your path to ensnare you. Not many
hours will pass before your house moans
loudly with lamentations. Hatred for you
is moving in the city. These are the ar-
rows that I launch at you! But now, lad,
lead me home that he may vent his rage
on younger men, that he may learn to
keep a tongue more temperate and find
more understanding within himself.

(The boy leads Teiresias out.)

CHORUS: Teiresias has prophesied dread

things, oh Creon? Every prophecy he has
spoken has been fulfilled.

CREON: Yes, this I know and am perplexed.

CHORUS: Oh mighty Creon, listen to his
advice.

CREON: Advise me and I will listen. What
shall I do?

CHORUS/LEADER: Release Antigone from
her cave of death and lay the unburied
Polyneices in a tomb.

CREON: You would have me yield?

CHORUS: We would and quickly. The gods
are ready to punish the foolishness of men.

CREON: How difficult it is to yield, and yet
I cannot fight against necessity. Yes, I
will yield!

CHORUS LEADER: Quickly, go then and
do it. Leave not this task to others.

CREON: Sentinels, make quick your speed
and release Antigone from her tomb of
death.

(Sentinels run out followed by Creon.)

(Enter a messenger.)

MESSENGER: Listen, you people of Thebes.
All is lost! Nothing is firm. You have no
happiness.

CHORUS: What is the weight of this heavy
news you bring?

MESSENGER: I bring you death!

CHORUS LEADER: Death? Who is dead?

MESSENGER: Haemon is dead!

CHORUS LEADER: Slain by himself or by
his father's hand?

MESSENGER: He killed himself.

CHORUS: Oh Teiresias, how your prophecy
comes true!

CHORUS LEADER: But look, Eurydice, the
Queen, comes forth from the palace. Has
she heard about her son?

(Enter Eurydice.)

EURYDICE: Good people, all, I heard. But
tell it to me once more for I am no stranger
to bad news.

MESSENGER: Dear mistress, I will tell you what I saw. I went with Creon up the hill to where Polyneices' body still lay, and we gave it holy washing and prayed to the gods that they would restrain their anger and be merciful. Then from the cave we heard a shrill lament! We rushed to the cave and saw the body of Antigone hanging in death. Strips from her dress had served as a rope. But Antigone was not alone in that cave of death for Haemon was there too. In remorse we saw him lean on his sword and drive half its length into his body. Hanging on to a slender thread of life, he embraced Antigone spilling his royal blood upon her. Dead with the dead he lies!

(Exit Eurydice into the palace.)

CHORUS: What can we think of this? The Queen, without a word, has gone hence.

MESSENGER: It is strange.

CHORUS LEADER: I know not, but her too much silence seems perilous.

MESSENGER: It is most unnatural. I'll follow her. *(Follows Eurydice into the palace.)*

CHORUS: Look! Creon comes!

(Enter Creon.)

CREON: You behold, people of Thebes, the slayer of his very own son. My own stubborn ways have borne bitter fruit. My son is dead. Haemon torn from me so young. The fault was mine!

CHORUS: Oh, how too late you discern the truth!

(Messenger enters from the palace.)

MESSENGER: Oh King, more sorrow upon your head! Within your house a second store of misery confronts you.

CREON: What? More? What worse evil yet remains?

MESSENGER: Queen Eurydice, your wife and true mother of Haemon, is dead! In

grief she plunged a blade into her heart.

CREON: In one fell swoop my son and wife! Oh gods, are you merciless?

(Sentinels carry in the body of Eurydice.)

CHORUS: Behold and see. There is her lifeless body!

CREON: Where will it end? What else can fate hold in store for me? Is there no one here who with one deadly thrust will end my life? My grief crushes me.

MESSENGER: The Queen cursed you as she died!

CREON: The guilt of slaying my wife and my son is mine alone. Even though I touched them not, I killed them both. Come night with no dawn. I pray for death.

CHORUS: Then pray no more. You cannot escape your suffering as decreed by the gods.

CREON: I know not which way to look. All things are crooked that I handle. My life has become intolerable.

(Creon exits into palace. Sentinels carry in Eurydice.)

CHORUS: Proud words of arrogant men in the end meet punishment. Old age learns too late to be wise.

(Chorus exits slowly.)

Reprinted from Albert Cullum, *Greek Tears and Roman Laughter* (New York: Citation Press, 1970), courtesy of the author.